

I Love You, You Know by peypsi

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Summary: Richie confesses his feelings for Eddie after a dangerous encounter.

1. Chapter 1

"I love you, you know."

The words lingered in the air, leaving it stale and unwelcome.

Eddie stared on, face paled by the others admission and stomach falling through the bed. He felt the words in his throat, though they stayed trapped there; like fish in a net, thrashing to be freed. Only a few made it out, passing Eddie's lips as nothing more than choked sounds.

Richie sat there, heart like thunder against his chest. He hadn't meant for the words to escape him. But seeing Eddie sitting there, tears in his eyes and face all beaten up, open wounds and dried blood smeared on his face and clothes; he couldn't help himself. That night had made it all too real.

What if he didn't get that chance again?

Their night had started like any other. The group of friends had been hanging out at the Mall, contemplating whether they should see a film or go to the arcade down the block.

Eddie had seemed uncomfortable and anxious all afternoon; mostly keeping silent, even when Richie made those stupid, immature jokes. Eddie didn't retort, only looking over his shoulder, seeming almost paranoid to the bespectacled teen.

Admittedly, Richie thought it best to take Eddie home, which to his own surprise, Eddie didn't deny. They separated from the rest of their loser's club around 9:30 pm, making their way silently through the lamp lit streets of Derry, Maine.

Hands in his pockets, Richie kept lensed eyes down upon the pavement, whole body heating up and leaving him feeling so wonderfully complete, simply from Eddie's company.

Eddie was far from warm, inside or out. He kept his arms tightly wound around himself, teeth chattering gently in the cool, mid-

autumn air. It was that sound alone that caught Richie's attention. Almost instantaneously, the taller brought his arm around Eddie's shoulders, pulling the smaller against his side; an action he would soon come to regret.

"Bit cold there, Eds?" He asked, rubbing the others arm as he held him close. Eddie didn't move, only nodding his head shallowly before turning deep brown eyes Richie's way.

"Fucking obviously, Richard. Don't call me Eds."

Though he wouldn't ever admit it, it always stung a little when Eddie said that, especially with the use of his full name. Smile that had once been spread over his face was quick to fall, and Richie brought his attention back to the sidewalk.

"Are you okay, Eddie?" He finally managed to ask, "I mean, you've been pretty weird all day... And– and don't lie to me. I know something's up."

"I'm fine."

"You're not."

Before Eddie could retort, the ambient silence around the was broken by the sound of drunken slew of words. For the first time all day, Eddie turned his head, for the hundredth time that day, to find a man angrily approaching.

It was hard to hear exactly what he was saying, though Eddie could get the gist; '*Fucking faggots*', '*Not in my fucking town*'. He spat at the sidewalk, wiping his mouth with his tattooed arm, though the ink was faded from a lifelong lived.

Richie only pulled Eddie closer, brows furrowing as he turned his eyes back to the man. All too soon, he was directing Eddie behind himself, putting himself between the man and the boy. "Look man, we don't want any trouble."

The stranger laughed, though the action alone caused him to drunkenly stagger. "*Yeah? No fucking trouble? Should'a fuckin' thought about that before you and your fucking Fairy boy decided to bum-chums*

in my fuckin' town."

Eddie was shaking, fingers tightly clutching to Richie's shirt as he tried to pull the shaggy haired teen along, whispering for Richie to move, to run, to do anything but stand there. But Richie didn't move, he didn't even budge; remaining still as the man approached.

"Sir, really. We don't need—"

Within one swift motion, a loud thwack sounded out throughout the street. Eddie screamed. Richie fell, spitting blood from his mouth and his glasses splaying out in the grass.

Hands to his face in shock, Eddie had tears in his wide, scared eyes. They moved from Richie on the ground to the man before him, who was only laughing. He spat at the teen on the ground, putting a few kicks to his ribs for good measure.

Hearing Richie groaning out in pain made something click in Eddie's head, and within an instant, he was at the man, using all his strength and weight to shove the stranger away from Richie. Only that close, could he see the rot on the man's teeth and lingering in his breath, the scratches on his skin, the dilation of his eyes, the clamminess of his face. Drugs. Eddie didn't know exactly, though he could only assume, and the assumption alone left his head spinning as he grew nauseous.

The man only shifted slightly under the teens attempt, and was soon laughing.

"Pathetic little fucking Faggot." He easily pushed Eddie down.

The boy fell back, groaning softly as he tried to bring himself back to his feet, although to no avail. His face was met with the underside to a dirty, old boot. His nose crunched under the pressure, head hitting the curb with a loud thud. Eddie cried. He was now on the receiving end of the attack, kicks and punches being thrown his way; to his torso, his face and his crotch.

Richie slowly pulled himself up, blinking through blurry vision as he turned his eyes to the attacker. The pain in his chest and side was

unimaginable, until he made out the shape of Eddie's body on the side of the pavement; trying to cower despite the man grabbing at his arms. Nothing was comparable to that feeling; that rage that burned in the pit of his stomach. That anger. Richie had never felt anything like it.

Stumbling to his feet, Richie wiped at his bleeding lip before stepping up to the man from behind. Hand to his collar and to his shoulder, Richie launched the man into the shallow trench by the sidewalk. Falling, the man landed in the decorative shrubbery, grumbling out in pain.

"You fucking dirty little pricks! I'll fucking kill you!"

Richie helped Eddie to his feet, trying to rush despite how gentle he had to be. "Eddie— Eddie my glasses."

The smaller nodded, wincing as he moved to where he saw the spectacles on the ground. He handed them to Richie, and they were off running before he could even slip them on his face.

Richie could hear the man in the distance. He had made it out of the bush, though he had no hope in hell of catching up to the pair. He shouted at them still, stumbling about the place they had fled.

It was 10:11 pm by the time Richie and Eddie were climbing through Eddie's bedroom window, which was something the smaller had never thought he'd have to do. But, he knew, if his mother saw him in such a state, that would be the end of everything.

Tiredly and painfully, the boy dropped down onto his bed with a heavy sigh, breathing out the fear and adrenaline causing his whole body to throb with heat. He covered his eyes with his arm before kicking off his shoes.

Richie stayed in place by the window for some long moments, eyes shifting between Eddie and the yard. Eventually, he drew the curtains closed. "Eds? Are you okay?"

No response.

"Eddie?" Voice riddled with concern, Richie stepped towards the bed,

gently settling himself upon it. Eddie hummed.

"Eddie, where's your first aid kit? I don't wanna leave you lookin' like—"

"Like I was murdered?"

"That's— well, *yeah*, one way to put it."

Eddie sighed, "School bag."

With a short nod, Richie stood, quickly searching through the others bag before pulling out a small, black, zip up pouch. If Richie didn't know better, he would have mistaken it for some girls make up bag. Sitting back on the bed, he pulled out some wipes and gauzes from the bag, soon wiping Eddie's face clean from the blood.

Eddie winced. "*It burns.*" He whispered, face recoiling some at the coldness of the wipe, though he didn't pull away from Richie's touch. In fact, he found himself leaning into it; much like he had earlier that night.

"I'm sorry, Eddie." Richie stated gently, sighing as he dropped his hand into his lap. "I'm sorry— we should've run... I'm such a fucking idiot." Eddie only pursed his lips, dark eyes staring at the floor, though he seemed to be in some far-off place.

"If I ever— *if I ever see that guy again...*" Richie spat the words out like venom, leaving Eddie's skin feeling like ice as he slowly turned his gaze up to the older teen. He furrowed his brow.

"What? What are you gonna do, Richard?" While his voice stayed low, no one would be able to miss the underlying anger in his tone, "*Nothing.* You're not going to do *anything.* He was— he was **drunk**, and high at least." Sighing, Eddie shifted in place, moving slightly away from the body beside him.

Richie frowned. His heart hung heavy with every word Eddie spoke, and he couldn't help the hurt that manifested in his gut when the other shifted away from him. "*I'd kill him.* Really, I would." He bit at the inside of his cheek, "I wanna protect you, Eds."

"Don't call me that, Richard." The smaller teen said quickly, thick brows downturned as he brought his eyes to Richie once more. "I don't– *I don't need protecting, asshole.* I'm fine on my own." He ran a grazed hand through his hair, "Hell, that probably wouldn't even have happened if you didn't– didn't put your arm around me!"

"You were cold!" Richie retorted, "I was just– I was just concerned about you, Eddie. You've been weird all day... I wanted to– I don't know... Make you smile or something at least once."

"Why do you care about that all of a sudden? It's ever bothered you before. I was havin' an off day, okay? Everything just felt– weird and wrong and I didn't want to go out in the first place." He sighed, trying to calm his breathing as he closed his arms around himself.

Silence settled. Both boys kept their eyes to the floor, though every so often, Richie felt his gaze wander up to Eddie's bloodstained face. Eddie never noticed, only using the back of his hand to wipe his eyes.

"I love you, you know."

Eddie, finally, brought teary eyes Richie's way, staring up at the other in nothing but complete disbelief. He couldn't register what he was feeling in that moment. It was completely indescribable by any other word but cold. Ice through his chest, like those long winter nights when everything just got to be too much and he'd sleep with the window open in hopes of feeling... something.

"W- what?"

But in that moment, staring up at Richie's warm summer eyes, head spinning with all the words he should have said, Eddie wasn't sure he wanted to feel at all.

2. Chapter 2

Eddie hadn't wanted to go to school that week. Actually, he did. He did, because that meant his mother would ease up a little, but his cuts and bruises were still obvious, especially his fractured nose. Swollen and unsightly. If he hadn't had a reason to be teased before, he surely had now.

He also didn't want to go for an even bigger reason: Richie.

Richie, his best friend. Richie, the loser. Richie, the inappropriate jokester. Richie, the trashmouth. Richie, the boy who loved Eddie.

The thought alone made Eddie pale.

Simply, he found it so fucking difficult to believe, to fathom, that Richard Fucking Tozier would ever love him. He was an idiot. He was an idiot who would use the term 'gay' as a negative adjective in every second sentence. A complete and utter asshole who would throw the word 'faggot' around for the fun of it. They were cool words to use, after all. Everyone used them.

There was just one problem;

Eddie didn't.

Eddie didn't because he was. He was those horrible words. Every day, he'd wake up from whatever wonderful little nightmare he would have, and then continue on his day to hear those words all around him. They stained his skin like thick, sludgy tar. He felt unclean; always. Like his fingers were smudged in soot and his face covered in dry mud. Mud that would spell out *'I'm a sissy fairy boy, come and fuck me'*.

He hated the words. He hated himself. And now? He hated Richie.

He especially hated Richie at lunch time when the freckled teen dropped down to sit beside Eddie at the cafeteria table, close enough that Eddie could have sworn he could hear the air moving through the older teen's nose. Air that would brush through those little hairs

that sometimes stuck out through Richie's flared nostrils when he got too excited.

"Hey Eds, did ya hear about what happened in the third period English class? Mr Woodward totally fuckin' split his pants! Right down his ass!" Richie howled, one hand over the back of Eddie's chair as the other cradled his stomach, as if his laughter and joy had pained him somehow.

Eddie only scowled, rolling oak eyes as he tried to turn his attention and body away from Richie, wanting to distance himself from the others looming frame even a little bit. He felt oddly hot whenever Richie was around now, and not in the good way. It was the type of sticky humidity that would come with late Spring. Eddie hated Spring. Well, no. He hated his hay fever; but it didn't help when fucking Trashmouth Tozier insisted in putting little yellow Buttercup flowers into Eddie's deep brown hair. Richie always thought he was so cute with flowers in his hair and all red faced. Eddie did not. Not when he could feel the irritation building with the sting of his eyes.

He found his body turned more into Bill who was sitting to his left. Eddie always liked Bill. Big Bill was nice. Always. It was as if he didn't have a mean bone in his body; and if he did, Eddie had certainly never seen it. Or, maybe Eddie was just biased. Him and Bill had been best friends since they had diapers... Practically.

"Sh-shuh-shut up, Richie." Bill said, breathing an annoyed sigh of his own as he shook his head. Eddie always liked to think that he and Bill shared some sort of telepathic link. It was the only reason he could explain how the other could read his mood and his mind so well.

"What?" Richie laughed still, screwing up that crooked nose as if he was some cute four-year-old. Really, he acted like one most times. "I'm just sayin'! Could you imagine seein' that? It would'a been funny as all hell!"

Only Beverly, Ben and Mike were laughing along with Richie. The other three boys, Eddie, Stan and Bill, couldn't be less amused, though perhaps that was because they knew about what had happened to Eddie and Richie those few, short days ago. And, worse

yet, Eddie had told them what Richie had said. He had too, he had been going crazy holding that information to himself. And now? Richie was slumped over the back of Eddie's chair.

Bill, of course, came to Eddie's rescue. He put his own arm over the back of Eddie's chair, more or less pushing Richie's off. The lanky teen only sighed, feeling some weird feeling stir in the core of his lower stomach. He pushed the feeling further down, resituating himself in his seat almost awkwardly. What the hell was that about?

"Just 'cause you guys don't know what funny is. Bet it could bite you in the ass and you wouldn't even feel it." He teased, sending a lopsided, almost charming smirk to both Eddie and Bill as he fiddled with the straw of his Capri Sun.

It wasn't even that bad today; Richie's jokes, but Eddie couldn't handle it. Quickly making up some excuse, the smallest of the gang excused himself, taking his mostly empty tray of food along with him. Richie followed.

"Hey, Eds, are you okay? Dude, you've been actin' weird all day." He said, falling in line with the shorter teen.

"I'm fine, Richard. Can you just leave me alone, please? I can't deal with it today."

"With what?"

"With you."

Blinking at that, slow and dumb, Richie's jaw hung loosely for a few seconds; mind running faster than his mouth for once. "O- oh... Uhh —did—did I do something wrong?" He asked, anxiously pocketing his hands into his slightly too-large jeans. It was the best Maggie could do with how quick her son was growing; nothing fit her darling quite right anymore.

"What do you think, Richie?" Eddie asked, eyes shifting about the cafeteria. No one seemed to be listening to their conversation or looking their way, but Eddie's skin burned as if he was mere meters from the sun. He itched at his arm.

"I—I don't know... I—I didn't make it weird, did I?" Richie asked, dark brows knitted together, concern littering his expression. Worried was a look that was never quite becoming on Richie's face. It always somehow managed to translate to queasy to those who weren't versed in the boy's expressions.

"Yes. Yes, you did. How the fuck could you think otherwise, Rich?" Eddie asked, his voice in a low hiss as he watched the others face seemingly twist and recoil in something akin to guilt, maybe? Eddie wasn't too sure.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Eddie... I'm sorry. I just—I was scared." Richie admitted, swallowing back his pride and major discomfort. "I was scared and—and upset, and I just wanted too—I don't know..."

Eddie blinked. Other than that night, this was the only other time he had seen Richie's humorous front fall like crumbling stone. He supposed he had been etching it away slowly for years now, though it was apparent that Eddie really was breaking this boy in front of him. He sighed. Grabbing Richie's arm, Eddie pulled him out of the cafeteria, through the hall and into the nearest boys' bathroom. Luckily, it was empty. Perfect.

"Richie, you don't—you don't just get to say that sort of thing after—after what happened. Do you realise the fucking stress you put on me? Every—Everything was fucked up and—and you're my best friend, Rich. My best, best friend, I—"'

Richie's heart sunk down to his feet in that moment. Really, he was sure he would have been able to shake it out of the bottom of his jeans. Blinking away at the stinging feeling that suddenly took over his eyes, he casted them southward to the linoleum floor.

"I'm—I'm not... mad." Eddie finally said, though his voice sounded more defeated now than anything. "I'm upset. Things are going to be different now and—and I didn't even know you liked boys that way... You know? With all the things you say—"

"The things I say? Those are jokes, Eddie!"

"I know that but—jokes can hurt people, Rich. They fucking hurt me

every time you say them."

A shuddered sigh past Richie's quaking lips then, eyes looking far past Eddie to some place the small boy could only dream of knowing. At least, wherever it was, it was keeping Richie together.

"I never thought of you that way, Richie... Not until you said it."

"Wait—" Richie held up his hands, "You've—you've been thinking about me?" He asked, "Us?"

God, was that the wrong thing to say, Eddie thought. "I mean—kind of... I can't really get what you said out of my head now. And whenever I see you I'm reminded of it and then my—my mind wanders to like, just about every fucking possible scenario and—I don't know, it makes me feel... weird."

"Weird?" Richie couldn't deny the anxiety that pooled and swirled in his chest, though he found this all too exciting at the same time. He always loved how into talking Eddie would get when the mood or subject took him. His arms would move all about the place as if acting out the words and his eyebrows would dance and wriggle over those wide puppy eyes that Richie could never seem to save himself from. They were a deep wood that he never wanted to leave. "Is—is it a good or a bad weird?"

"Does it matter?" Eddie asked, finally bringing his arms around himself somewhat protectively. "It's weird all the same and—and it makes me not wanna even look at you... It's hard now, Rich."

Full lips pursed into a thin and tight line, Richie was quick to turn his eyes to the ground again, though the glance only last a second, as he was soon turning a hopeful expression Eddie's way. "Can I try something? You—You can hate me forever if I'm wrong, but—but can I?"

Despite his better judgement and the way his gut seemed to squeeze, Eddie only nodded.

Richie's stomach twisted in the most wild and pleasant of ways. He wanted to savour the feeling a moment, knowing full well that he

may never have it again; but this was no time to waste. Eddie wasn't a patient person, he could be at the right time, but that wasn't now. If Richie faltered, Eddie would grow antsy quickly.

Richie stepped forward, swallowing back all the anxiety and fear that was building up within him. Shaking palms came up to gently cup either side of Eddie's face, the smaller teen's eyes growing wide with realisation in that instant, though he didn't budge. He didn't move a single muscle, and Richie eased. He eased down that fraction of the way, tipping Eddie's head back gently as he softly, so fucking softly, brought their lips together. It was sweet and light and fleeting, and it was fucking everything Richard had hoped it would be.

His lungs filled with fire as his knees turned to goo and his fingers prickled, itched and dared to curl into Eddie's neatened hair. He lost himself completely against Edward's lips, the lightest of sighs passing through those same nostrils that had irked the younger teen to death earlier.

Now? Eddie revelled in the soft sound. His own hands had unravelled from across his chest, slowly coming to hold either of Richie's wrists as he shyly and feebly returned the kiss. Five seconds seemed like an eternity, and Eddie wasn't quite sure how the fuck he was going to continue on living if he couldn't stay right there in that moment; his knees buckling under the weight of his heart.

Richie was the first to pull back, and he could have sworn Eddie had taken his whole heart with him as the small teen lowered himself back onto his feet. Richie hadn't even realised Eddie had been on his toes. He laughed.

"What?" Eddie asked, blinking about half a dozen times as he lowered his hands, hearing the bathroom door swing open from behind Richie's body.

"Nothing, nothing." Richie assured, hands still securely holding Eddie's face, not wanting to let him go for the world. Both their faces were red, though Eddie's was so much more apparent; burning at Richie's palms. "That was just—well, that was amazing."

"It was okay." Eddie lied, like the big down-playing fibber he was. He

swatted Richie's hands away then, arms returning around himself. "For a first kiss, I mean. I guess—well, I shouldn't be too surprised that that's—what you were going to do... You should have given me a better warning, though." He said, "I mean, we're in the boys' bathroom, Richie."

"Oh, right... Yeah, I didn't—I didn't think about that." He said, scratching at the back of his head awkwardly as he looked around, greasing off the guy taking a piss to the left of them. "I'll—I'll make it up to you, okay?"

Eddie seemed confused by that, though the words peaked his interest easily. "How are you going to do that? I don't think there's any coming back from this."

Richie only smiled. That wide, goofy, lopsided fucking smile that would squish up his nose and eyes so fucking cutely; Eddie thought so at least. He hated it.

"How 'bout a date?"